

Hennepin County Department of Economic Assistance Site Visit Report

Background

State staff (Lisa Hanson, Jim Jones, and John Haine) and Milwaukee County staff (Felice Riley, Debbie Bigler, Norma Broaden, Caridad Colon, John Thomas, Victoria Joshua, Paula Lucey, and Joseph Cooper) conducted a site visit to gain information about the following processes that have been implemented in the Hennepin County Department of Economic Assistance

- Electronic Case Management System (DIAMOND)
- Team Based Case Management
- Training Approach
- Customer Call Center
- Multi-Cultural Services

All of the changes made in Hennepin County were paid for out the county's existing IM budget or were supplemented with county revenue.

Electronic Case Management System (DIAMOND)

Hennepin fully implemented a paperless case management system in 1999. All case documentation, including the paper application, is scanned into the DIAMOND system. This results in an electronic case file available to the work teams handling cases, as well as other staff in Hennepin County responsible for answering questions from customers, managing staff and their workload and staff who monitor quality assurance.

In addition, forms that need to be filled out by the client or others can be sent directly to that client or others by the system either through a centralized print-to-mail system or via fax.

The following are scanned into the system:

- Mail received from the US Post Office
- All forms and verification documentation dropped off by clients associated with changes
- All forms and verification documentation provided during the application and recertification processes, both in-person and through the mail.
- Information received by fax are electronically routed to and captured by the scanner.
- Document examples are attached

The DIAMOND system is not connected to their eligibility system, MAXIS.

The DIAMOND system does not capture data (like Wisconsin does with the SeniorCare application); it only captures the image. So workers still have to key into MAXIS data reported through forms or as verification documentation.

Significant Information about DIAMOND

1. Centralized Imaging Staff: 4 teams of 6 staff/team using a \$35,000 Scanner

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2. Volume: 350,000 documents each month (Approximately 2,300 documents each business day)
3. Documents to be scanned are prioritized so that critical information is available to workers quickly.
4. Electronic Case File - completely paperless
5. Cost control monitoring: 25.06 cents/page vs. salary staff handling paper forms and files in the previous system
6. Turn around time for documents
 - Fax in, 2-5 hrs (about 2,300/day)
 - Mail (included drop box), same day received
 - Out of county incoming cases, same day received
 - Intake, 3 business days
 - Returned mail, immediately
 - Field intake, 3-5 business days
8. System has had an impact on lowering their FS error rate since it was fully implemented in late 1999: 1999-8%, 2000-2.9%, 2001-4.8%, 2002-6%
9. System essential, according to staff, for team concept to work because it allows for all team members to work on cases in the team

Hennepin County Teams

Hennepin County Department of Economic Assistance has a total of 480 staff with two divisions:

1. Family Assistance
2. Elderly and Adults Assistance

The Department administers the Minnesota Family Independence Program (the AFDC replacement program), the Food Support (Stamp) program, Medicaid, Minnesota Support Assistance, General Assistance, General Assistance Medical and Long Term Support. County agencies do not operate the S-CHIP program, MinnesotaCare (equivalent to BadgerCare), which is administering through the mail by the state. Managers estimate that they receive state/federal funds of \$252 for each case.

In 1995 Hennepin County management determined that increasing caseloads and budget constraints meant that a new approach to case management was needed. To deal with these issues a team was developed to move:

From

To

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- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Program-centered• Process focus• Sole responsibility• Multiple, visible hand-offs• Fragmented service | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Client-centered• Results focused• Shared responsibility• Seamless appearance• Integration |
|---|---|

Planning started in 1996. The cultural change started in 1998 with implementation in 2002. The transition process was successful because there was dedicated resources allocated to the transition for additional staff training, technical support and consultants.

Team Process

Hennepin County managers stressed that they have always been very customer-focused. For this reason they have always assigned workers at the highest pay and benefits to handle face-to-face contact with their customers. Workers who are not at this highest handle day-to-day work associated with case processing and workload management. Before 2002, Hennepin County and their highest level workers were doing interviews for public assistance applications and reviews. All other workers had individual caseloads and handled day-to-day case processing. This processing stream caused all sorts of problems for the workers and for their customers.

Starting in the fall of 2002 the team process was implemented in the Family Assistance Division. Twenty units (10 staff/unit) were set up. Who was assigned to which unit with which supervisor was handled in a lottery. Everyone is 'locked into' their team (except for promotions) for at least six months to a year. Since they haven't yet reached the six-month time limit, there is no information about how many people will want to move. Management then provided training to supervisors and teams on team building. Before the team was assigned a team caseload, the group of individuals met to organize how they would do work. They were provided with an outline to follow as they moved towards this new approach. On a staggered basis (two teams at a time) teams were assigned caseloads. From that point forward there were no longer individual caseloads. Each unit was assigned a caseload of about 1,500 cases. There are 38 teams of workers across the entire Economic Assistance Department.

Units meet daily to assess work for that day. Also, units set up weekly or daily work schedules to assign different work activities. Typically staff are assigned to do intakes, answer phone calls and handle recerts. The team decides, with the supervisor, the work priorities for the workday and week.

Significant Information about Hennepin County's Team Approach

1. New job classifications were set up for new work configurations centering on client service.
2. More than one person looking at a case improves the quality of the case.
3. Multiple hands on a case present a learning opportunity for unit members.
4. The union (AFSCME) supported the change.
5. Seniority in Minnesota only applies to lay-off situations, so setting up teams with a random selection was not a problem.

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6. The virtual case file system (DIAMOND) is essential to the team system working.
7. Almost all MA only applications are mail-in and assigned to teams.
8. The team balances its own workload.
9. Strong support for team process from local government, from county exec down.
10. QA is done by case reviews.
11. Some pros and cons of teaming

Pros

New staff start working in unit sooner, with unit mentoring

Client driven: can get better information sooner and case actions are processed more timely

Staff shortages, illness or vacations are no longer a major issue as far as keeping up with workload

Cons

Major cultural change for everyone involved (managers, supervisors, workers, advocates, clients, etc.)

Clients do not have a single worker contact

There is a team learning curve, which is not always smooth

Training Approach with Team-Based Caseloads

With the move to team-based caseloads, Hennepin County changed the way that it delivered training. Before teams Hennepin County and State trainers provided approximately 14 weeks of face-to-face training to a worker, before the worker was sent back to their unit to assume a caseload. This has changed. Now workers go through a three-day orientation with county staff, then are sent back to their teams where the team begins including the worker in daily assignments. Workers learn through a combination of mentoring and 'shadowing' more experienced workers. Over the course of the next several months the new worker receives additional ½ day training from county trainers on public assistance program processing (MAXIS, DIAMOND, etc.) Workers also attend two one-week training sessions provided by the state that focus on the basic policies of the Food Stamps and Medicaid programs. More complex policies are explored with the worker's team mentor as the worker faces new case situations.

This approach to training, according to Hennepin County managers, is possible because the state has invested in well-written on-line handbooks. Workers on a panel also explained that they use state-developed web-based checklists they follow in specific case situations. When asked what a team does when faced with a policy that was unclear, the workers said that these questions were very rare since the handbooks and checklists were so clear. They also said that when an individual was unsure of the policy, the team discussed what to do. Usually, at least one worker had faced the situation before and already knew the answer.

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The Customer Call Center

As part of the initiative to improve customer service a separate call center (the EA Communication Center) was established in 2000. The mission of the call center is to provide inbound economic assistance callers with excellent customer service in an efficient manner.

EA Call Center Process

All calls are sent to the call center. Since most calls are about case status or benefit status, the call center can respond, taking this workload away from the EA staff. In situations where there are eligibility questions the call is forwarded to the appropriate team. Each Client Service Reps has access to case info and can transfer to a team knowing that someone will respond. The call center does make address changes but nothing else to the case.

Significant Information about the EA Communication Center

1. The center handles call from two divisions, the Families Assistance and Adult and Disabled Assistance Divisions.
2. Average calls per day = 5,100
3. Average speed of answer = 3min. 38 sec.
4. Currently a 23% abandon rate, goal is 5-7%
5. Total FTEs = 44
6. Five foreign languages spoken on site – Spanish, Somali, Russian, Hmong, Vietnamese
7. The major call types – case status, change reporting (to EA staff) benefit issuance, general information
8. Moving to IVR for some Q&A in September 2003
9. Staff turnover rate – 44%
10. QA done with call monitoring

Multi-cultural services

In response to Limited English Proficiency mandates from HHS, Hennepin County has implemented multi-cultural service delivery for its assistance programs. The languages spoken by staff are Hmong, Vietnamese, Somali, Spanish, Lao and Russian. In addition, staff offering additional language skills are on call and work for another county agency, the Office of Multi-Cultural Service.

Significant Information about Multi-cultural services

1. 23% of all applicants are non-English speaking
2. Most EA units have some translation capability
3. At present about 150,000 LEP individuals access EA services
4. The Somali population in Minneapolis is about 50,000